(d) whether Government feels that the situation in Myanmar could affect the political climate of the Northeast States, which are already sensitive?

THE MINISTER OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI PRANAB MUKHERJEE) (a) to (d) Government have been in touch with the Myanmar Government at the highest levels on the recent developments in Myanmar. It is Government's view that the process of national reconciliation and political reform initiated by the Government of Myanmar should be taken forward expeditiously and should be inclusive and broad-based to include all sections of the society, including Aung San Suu Kyi and various ethnic groups. India supports the UN Secretary General's good offices and his Special Envoy Mr. Ibrahim Gambari's mission to Myanmar. We do not believe that sanctions will be useful in this situation. As a close and friendly neighbour, India has multi-dimensional linkages with Myanmar. Government are, consequently, mindful of the need for a peaceful and stable Myanmar.

YCL activists in Indian territory

1458. SHRIMATI SHOBHANA BHARTIA:
PROF. ALKA BALRAM KSHATRIYA:

Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether a large number of Young Communist League (YCL) activists from Kakarvita in Nepal have entered border States such as West Bengal and Bihar and pitched three red flags-a national flag of Nepal, a Maoist flag and the YCL flag in the Indian territory;

(b) if so, the facts and details thereof;

(c) whether the Nepal Government has not been taking any interest in checking the anti-Indian propaganda being made by YCL activists; and

(d) if so, the facts thereof and further steps taken by Government to take up the matter with the Nepalese Government?

THE MINISTER OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI PRANAB MUKHERJEE): (a) and (b) On December 5, 2007, a group of about 20—25 Young Communist League (YCL) cadres crossed from Kakarvita, Nepal into the Indian territory near border pillar No. 49 upto the west bank of Mechi river and pitched three flags. The Indian border guarding forces took appropriate action to repulse the YCL activists and removed the flags.

(c) and (d) Such incidents have been taken up appropriately with the Government of Nepal, to ensure that they are not repeated and so that those responsible are dealt with.

Flow of tourists from Malaysia

1459. PROF. ALKA BALRAM KSHATRIYA:
SHRIMATI SHOBHANA BHARTIA:

Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether the growing ethnic Indian unrest in Malaysia and its Government's latest move to ban fresh recruitment of Indian workers has an adverse effect on the plans to woo tourists from this country;

(b) if so, whether Government has taken up the matter with the Malaysian Government to sort out the differences and to promote flow of tourists; and

(c) if so, the details thereof and the likely affect on flow of tourists from Malaysia to this country?

THE MINISTER OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI PRANAB MUKHERJEE): (a) A firm assessment on whether recent developments relating to the ethnic Indian community in Malaysia or the reported move of the Malaysian Government to freeze recuitment of Indian workers (which was categorically denied by the Malaysian Government, including by the Minister of Home Affairs and the Minister of Works) had any adverse impact on Malaysia's plans to attract tourists from India is difficult to make. Provisional figures obtained from Ministry of Tourism of Malaysia indicate that about 4,22,000 tourists arrived in Malaysia from India in 2007, as compared to about 2,79,000 tourists in 2006.

(b) and (c) As for developments pertaining to the ethnic Indian community in Malaysia, it may be recalled that in a *suo motu* statement made in Parliament on 30 November, 2007, Hon'ble Minister of External Affairs referred to the concerns expressed by Hon'ble Members of Parliament regarding the alleged harassment of participants of the rally organised by the HINDRAF in Kuala Lumpur on 25 November, 2007 and subsequent related matters. Government of India remain deeply solicitious for the welfare of people of Indian origin living abroad, while noting that there is a large community of people of Indian origin in Malaysia who are citizens of that country. He added that we have friendly relations with Malaysia and we are in touch with the Malaysian authorities. During our interactions with Malaysian authorities, concerns expressed in India, including in the Parliament, regarding the developments pertaining to the Indian community in Malaysia have been suitably conveyed.

In early January this year, there were reports in the media suggesting that the Government of Malaysia had imposed a ban on recruitment of workers from India. On 7 January, 2008, Malaysia Hindu Sangam issued a press statement conveying that the Malaysian Immigration Department had stopped issuing permits to new applicants (from India) coming to Malaysia as Hindu priests, temple musicians and sculptors and that authorities were renewing work permits of priests, temple musicians and sculptors only for limited periods. As these reports were picked up by the media, including in India, the Minister of Home Affairs of Malaysia called a press conference on 9 January,2008; to clarify that the Government of Malaysia had not frozen recruitment of workers from India, and that there was no ban on Hindu priests coming to Malaysia, though the applicants had to go through more stringent checks. On 19 January, 2008; the Secretary General of Ministry of Home was quoted by a local newspaper as stating that Malaysia was reviewing its policy of managing foreign workers to reduce its dependence on them.

We are not aware of any significant dip in tourist arrivals from Malaysia to India. We have been working to encourage tourism from Malaysia to India. It may by noted that in the year 2007, the High Commission of India, Kuala Lumpur issued 93,223 visas (including 73,000 tourist visas), as compared to 82,463 visas (including 63,527 tourist visas) issued in 2006.